

**Analytical report on coverage of  
deportation of Ukrainian children in  
russian media**

## **CONTENT**

I. METHODOLOGY.....	3
II. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CONTEXT OF DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION .....	4
III. HOW THE RUSSIAN MEDIA COVERS THE DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN .....	6
IV. NARRATIVES OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN CONTEXT OF DEPORTATIONS OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN BY RUSSIA.....	15
V. CONCLUSIONS.....	30

## I. METHODOLOGY

The russian state TV channels ("Planeta RTR", "Rossiya 24", "NTV-Mir", "360") were taken as a basis for monitoring and analysis and the recordings from the above channels are carried out by the National Council. Monitoring covered the period from February 24, 2022 to May 2023. This is due to the fact that Russia carried out a direct full-scale invasion with numerous violations resulted in public, in particular, media resonance. However, the report may contain media records, materials or communications from an earlier period if necessary to review the context of Russian propaganda. The National Council was primarily interested in news and informational and analytical broadcasts. News stories (for news broadcasts) and individual statements (mainly for informational and analytical broadcasts) were taken as the unit of analysis. The beginning of each story or statement was recorded in Kyiv time zone. Among the online media, the following resources were studied: "Izvestia", "Moskovskiy Komsomolets", "vesti.ru", "RIA", "Radio Sputnik", "Vedomosti", "Parlamentskaya gazeta", "AiF", "Kommersant", "Lenta.ru", "TASS", "SM.News", "bloknot.ru", "Obschestvennaya Sluzba Novostey", which, according to the information of "Medialogiya"<sup>1</sup> company (which monitors the Russian media to find out the effectiveness of their communication), are the most popular in Russia. A text (news) message was taken as the unit for analysis in online media. The National Council, due to the lack of access to the radio space of the aggressor state, monitors Russian radio stations on Internet, so the analysis was based on "Radio Sputnik" online media, which is the online version of this radio station. Based on these circumstances, the National Council cannot claim the completeness and finality of this study. The collected materials, on the basis of which the analysis was carried out, are attached to the analytical report in the form of MS Word documents entitled "Narratives and disinformation on TV channels of the Russian Federation" in the amount of 1 file, which contains the description and transcribed text of individual statements and messages, MS Excel named "Table of narratives and disinformation" and "Table of online resources of the Russian Federation" in a total of 2 files, which contain information about statements and links to relevant messages. The file named "Table of Narratives and Disinformation" systematizes narratives and disinformation messages to confirm systematic Russian propaganda influence on the topic of deportation of Ukrainian children, as well as to confirm that disinformation messages and narratives in Russian media are typical. Data from open sources, mainly from the EUvsDisinfo resource, as well as materials from

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<sup>1</sup>[About Medialogiya company \(mlg.ru\)](http://mlg.ru)

research institutes, expert groups, authorized international representatives and missions, were used to refute narratives and disinformation.

## II. THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CONTEXT OF DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation carried out a full-scale invasion of Ukraine justifying it by the need to carry out the so-called "SVO" (special military operation). In fact, Russia carried out armed aggression<sup>2</sup> against Ukraine, which was accompanied by numerous gross violations of international humanitarian law (hereinafter referred to as the IHL), the UN Charter and other internationally recognized legal documents, namely the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity<sup>3</sup>. In connection with this, the international arena raised the issue of recognizing Russia's aggression against Ukraine as a real act of genocide of the Ukrainian people. One of its components is deportation or forced displacement of the population, including children<sup>4</sup>. The deportation of Ukrainian children by Russia was recognized by the Resolution of the European Parliament of September 15, 2022<sup>5</sup> and was condemned by many Western countries. In addition, the PACE<sup>6</sup> and the OSCE also recognized that the deportation of Ukrainian children by Russia actually took place and is still taking place today. From the point of view of international law, the deportation of children is one of 6 serious violations against children in the conditions of military conflicts. The UN Security Council adopted UNSCR 1261 in 1999, which detailed six serious violations against children during armed conflict. These violations stem from the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, as well as the Geneva Conventions (including their additional protocols), the Rome Statute and the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>7</sup>. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly recognized the crimes of the Russian Federation against Ukraine as genocide and the terrorist regime in the Russian Federation as racism<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>[Radio Svoboda Weekly: The UN resolution requires Russia to immediately withdraw its troops from Ukraine \(radiosvoboda.org\)](https://www.radiosvoboda.org/en/2022/03/23/un-resolution-requires-russia-to-withdraw-troops-ukraine/)

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.hrw.org/uk/news/2023/03/29/ga-justice-efforts-ukraine#\\_top](https://www.hrw.org/uk/news/2023/03/29/ga-justice-efforts-ukraine#_top)

<sup>4</sup>[The Rome Statute of International Criminal... | from 17.07.1998 \(rada.gov.ua\)](https://www.rada.gov.ua/en/acts/laws/show/1707-1998), Article 7, Clause 1

<sup>5</sup>[TA MEF \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu/press-room/media/33444)

<sup>6</sup>[Doc. 15748 - Report - Working document \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/t/Document/15748.htm)

<sup>7</sup> RUSSIA'S SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM FOR THE RE-EDUCATION & ADOPTION of UKRAINE'S CHILDREN, p.8

Therefore, when Russia abducts or seizes children, it violates the Geneva Conventions and commits war crimes and crimes against humanity. In this case, we are talking about the Convention relative to the Protection of the Civilian Population in Time of War, namely Article 50 "The occupying power... may not, in any case, change their personal status, nor enlist them in formations or organizations subordinate to it"<sup>9</sup>. This Convention was denounced by Russia in November 2019 expanding the possibilities for continuing its criminal activities.

Russia is using its media to portray Ukrainians and their allies in the war against Russia as enemies, and presents its crimes as completely legitimate, justified, expedient and necessary. Therefore, Russia tries to justify, conceal and minimize the negative consequences of its criminal activities via media to reflect on TV, Internet, in radio, press and other media resources. The National Council conducts regular monitoring of Russian federal TV channels to detect hostile and especially dangerous rhetoric towards Ukraine, the Ukrainian people and the military-political leadership of Ukraine, as well as its allies. The deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia is, of course, a manifestation of Russia's criminal activity in the war against Ukraine, and therefore the reflection of this in the Russian media is of great importance and should be analyzed in detail. The National Council studied recordings of television programs, news reports of Russian online media (the list is attached), focusing, first of all, on the period from the beginning of 2022 to the present.

The official reason for Russia's war against Ukraine was the signing on February 21, 2022 by V. Putin, the president of the Russian Federation, of the so-called decree on the recognition of the pseudo-republics L/DPR<sup>10</sup> stipulating that actual "borders" of these pseudo-republics would be the administrative boundaries of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and Ukrainian military forces would have to completely leave them. After holding of pseudo-referendums in September 2022, the territories captured by Russia were allegedly declared as part of the Russian Federation accompanied by the issuance of Russian passports for Ukrainians who stayed on the territories occupied and annexed by Russia. The "legal" basis for this was the decree "On determining for humanitarian purposes the categories of

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3712643-parlamentska-asamblea-nato-viznala-zlocini-rosii-proti-ukraini-genocidom.html>

<sup>9</sup>[Convention on the Protection of the Civilian Population... | dated August 12, 1949 \(rada.gov.ua\)](#), Art. 50

<sup>10</sup><https://pravo.ru/news/239344/>

persons who have the right to apply for citizenship of the russian federation in a simplified manner"<sup>11</sup> signed by v. putin in 2019. Although in legal sense this decree is null and void and has no legal consequences for Ukraine, it lays a substantial foundation for russian propaganda to be discussed below.

### III. HOW THE RUSSIAN MEDIA COVERS THE DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN

On February 21, 2022, when v. putin recognized the independence of the so-called "DPR and LPR", at the same time the russian side announced shelling by the Ukrainian army and announced an "evacuation" to the russian federation<sup>12</sup>. After that, reports appeared in the media about how russia was deporting Ukrainian children to its territory.

*Example of information from the records of the National Council:* in the fragment dated March 9, 2022 at 07:17 PM (Kyiv time) in "Vesti" program on "RTR Planeta" channel, the presenter talks about the meeting of the president of russia v. putin with the Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova, during which bureaucratic obstacles to registration of children taken out of Ukraine into russian families were discussed. Lack of russian citizenship for many children was called as one of these obstacles. The plot also contains story about how Ukrainian children from the boarding school in Donetsk were taken to the institution on the territory occupied by russia. The children's faces are clearly visible, one of the girls in the frame is an interviewee. Her name is Carolina. At the end of the storyline, v. putin is talking to M. Lvova-Belova, and asking her to submit proposals to the relevant authorities to remove bureaucratic obstacles in order to place Ukrainian children without russian citizenship into russian families.

This is one of the first cases when the russian media mentioned not only that russia transfer Ukrainian children to its territory, but also that there are certain legal norms that prevent adoption or "registration" of Ukrainian children into russian families. This may indicate that the news report intends to allow certain legislative procedures and legalize adoption or "registration" of Ukrainian children

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<sup>11</sup><https://base.garant.ru/72229888/#friends>

<sup>12</sup> <https://iz.ru/1396878/2022-09-17/v-donetcke-chetyre-cheloveka-pogibli-v-rezultate-obstrelya-so-storony-vs>

into russian families. From a legal point of view, such actions are strictly prohibited by international law.

For example, on April 21, 2022, there was a message on the website of the "Izvestiya" media resource that more than 150,000 Ukrainian children from the so-called "L/DPR" had already been transferred to russia<sup>13</sup>. The message about how Donbas children were recuperating in russian children's camps was published in June 2022 in "Moscowskyi Komsomolets" online publication.

In order to trace the regularity in messages of the russian media in the context of deportation of children and to determine their relationship, the table was compiled to determine the nature of the above information provided to the media. All media are divided by their field of activity (television, radio, Internet). Each type of media was assessed on whether it disseminated information which:

- justifies russia`s illegal actions in the context of the deportation of Ukrainian children;
- discredits Ukraine`s actions and its political leadership in the context of protecting Ukrainian children from the consequences of russia's war against Ukraine;
- discredits the actions of Western states, allies of Ukraine and partner organizations of Ukraine in the context of protecting Ukrainian children from the consequences of russia's war against Ukraine.

This table makes it possible to assess whether the reports of various russian media regarding the deportation of Ukrainian children are systematic. The assessment is performed by counting "+" matches in columns. For example, "Justification of russia`s illegal actions in the context of deportation of Ukrainian children" column has 14 out of 18 (14/18) possible values of "+". This means that 14 out of media recources (taken for monitoring and analysis) disseminated information justifying russia's illegal actions in the context of the deportation of Ukrainian children. If a certain cell in the column is empty, it means that such information was not detected during the monitoring and analysis in the selected period of time.

According to the table:

- 15/20 media resources taken as a basis for monitoring and analysis disseminated information justifying russia's illegal actions in the context of the deportation of Ukrainian children;

<sup>13</sup>[More than 150,000 children were evacuated from the DPR and LPR to Russia. | News of society | Izvestia | 04/22/2022 \(iz.ru\)](#)

- 11/20 media resources taken as the basis for monitoring and analysis disseminated information that discredits Ukraine in the context of protecting Ukrainian children from the consequences of war and deportation;
- 17/20 media resources taken as the basis of monitoring and analysis disseminated information discrediting Western states, Ukraine's allies and partner organizations in the context of protection against the consequences of war;
- 10/20 media resources taken as a basis for monitoring and analysis resorted to spreading information in all the above directions (discrediting Ukraine, Western countries and justifying the actions of Russia).

According to the table, it can be noted that 3 Russian TV channels (Rossiya 24, Planeta RTR, NTV-Mir) mostly resort to spreading information that justifies Russia's criminal actions and discredits Ukraine or its allies, or both. TV channels "Planeta RTR"<sup>14</sup> and "Rossiya 24", which belongs to the same media concern VDTRK<sup>15</sup> as Planeta RTR, are state-owned TV channels. NTV-Mir is a television channel of a joint-stock company "Telecompaniya NTV", which is one of the subsidiaries of PJSC "Gazprom"<sup>16</sup>. These channels are publicly accessible that indicates about the potential of their significant influence on the Russian audience. In the course of the analysis of the statements of Russian politicians and officials involved in the deportation of Ukrainian children, a tendency to spread information justifying illegal actions of Russia in deportation of Ukrainian children and, at the same time, to discriminate against Ukraine and its allies, Western partners regarding the protection of Ukrainian children can be traced.

The online media listed in the table were selected on the basis of their greatest popularity according to the Medialogiya<sup>17</sup> resource. In addition, international versions of TV channels continue satellite broadcasting to the territory of European countries. In this way, they continue to spread propaganda narratives and disinformation to an external audience, which may have an impact on the implementation of the foreign policy of these states in relation to Ukraine in its confrontation with Russia.

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<sup>14</sup>[RTR - Planeta is a Russian news TV channel owned by VDTRK, which is broadcast abroad War and sanctions \(nazk.gov.ua\)](#)

\*Ren.tv is a Russian TV channel, but since the National Council does not record it, the report uses material from the Ren.tv online resource, which mainly publishes similar content. <sup>15</sup>[VGTRK RUSSIA 24 - VGTRK \(vgtrk.ru\)](#)

<sup>16</sup>[JOINT STOCK COMPANY "TELECOMPANY NTV" | War and sanctions \(nazk.gov.ua\)](#)

<sup>17</sup>[Ratings of federal mass media Medialogy \(mlg.ru\)](#)



*Table showing regularity of russian media reports  
on the deportation of Ukrainian children*

<b>Media type</b>	<b>Media name</b>	<b>Justification of russia`s illegal actions in the context of deportation of Ukrainian children</b>	<b>Discrediting Ukraine in the context of protecting its children</b>	<b>Discrediting Western states in context protection of Ukrainians children</b>
<i>TV</i>	RTR PLANETA	+	+	+
	Rossiya 24	+	+	+
	NTV Mir	+	+	
	360	+		
	Ren.tv*			+
<i>Online edition</i>	Izvestiya	+		+
	Moscowskyi Komsomolets	+	+	+
	Kommersant	+	+	+
	Lenta ru	+	+	+
	Gazeta.ru	+	+	+
	AIF	+	+	+
	RIA	+	+	+
	Parlamentskaya gazeta	+	+	+
	Obschestvennaya Sluzba Novostey			+
	SM.News			+
	vesti.ru			+
	Vedomosti	+		+
	TASS	+		
	bloknot.ru			+
<i>Radio</i>	Radio Sputnik	+	+	+

#### IV. NARRATIVES OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN CONTEXT DEPORTATIONS OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN BY RUSSIA

Public statements by v. putin, M. Lvova-Belova, M. Zakharova, T. Moskalkova, K. Mishonova, V. Nebenzya can generally be characterized as those that were aimed at justifying russia's illegal actions towards Ukrainian children, discrediting Ukraine and its allies in the context of child protection. The statement

of the head of information and press department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Mariya Zakharova on March 20, 2023 at 00:04 in the program "Voskresnyi vecher s Vladimirom Solovievym" ("Sunday Evening with Vladimir Soloviev") on the "RTR Planeta" channel can be considered as the most striking one in this regard:

*"... Literally next day it came out, well, I can't say... some kind of journalistic investigation, no, they just drew attention to the fact from what family originates that prosecutor from this very "as if criminal" court of the International Criminal Court, yes? Indeed, the connection through his native brother with pedophiles, and this, as you understand, is not a single case when people hold such high-ranking positions and are in such so-called "elite circles", then, of course, we are talking about a certain lobby. So what has this to do with Maria Lvova-Belova doing here? And what has this to do with president Putin? Yes, it's very simple. The fact is that our country cut off the supply channel of children to these very Western liberal elites, children who were not protected by any rights before Russia intervened on their behalf, because we are talking about children, street children, children refused by their parents in the territory of Ukraine, in the territory, one way or another, previously controlled by Ukraine. Then the situation changed. These children were intended for such... well, by and large, freaks, bastards like the brother of this very performer - accuser Musa. And we took as a country, as a people, which does not give in to this wildest influence of the West in this direction, and let me remind you: after all, it is the liberal Western elites who introduced a new normality in the form of sex change for children. In view of the depravation of children by instilling an ideology in them, it is not only same-sex relationship, it is much more frightening there. ... These defenseless children, whom Maria Lvova-Belova, having the relevant powers and the legislative framework that was developed in our country for many years, as the president of Russia spoke about, she did not and does not allow them to be hurt and simply saves their lives. These children, among other things, could become a victim, so to speak, of representatives of black transplantology, with whom even the ICTY could not fight.*

*... I will repeat once again: hundreds of people, these are the same children who did not have any status protection, they were refusers. Russia accepted these children as native ones, legally protected them from the chaos that they would face, being adopted, you know, by whom and how, or simply doomed to what the Serbs went through in their time, the Gypsies in their time as part of the Kosovo chaos".*

In this statement, M. Zakharov uses 2 methods at once - justifying Russia's actions and discrediting Ukraine and its allies and partners. It is important that M. Zakharova holds a high official position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, being an official representative of this ministry. Therefore, her statement, voiced on the live air of the TV program, contains signs of the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in relation to all Western countries and authoritative international supranational and human rights organizations. Therefore, any arguments that M. Zakharova's statement is only her personal opinion, which is not related to the performance of her official duties, have no grounds. M. Zakharova expresses her statements publicly and to a wide audience of the popular Russian state TV channel. Such statements have an impact on the audience and are part of Russian propaganda. They demonstrate the official position of the Russian Foreign Ministry on the deportation of Ukrainian children.

The statement by Konstantin Dolgov (deputy chairman of the Committee of the Federation Council) shows a similar trend, as he simultaneously discredits Ukraine and Western countries, while excusing Russia instead. In the statement on March 20, 2023 at 11:30 a.m. in the program "60 Minutes" on "RTR Planeta" channel, K. Dolgov claims that the arrest warrant for V. Putin is a biased decision of the ICC, because in history there have been cases of crimes by other states, although the leaders of these states were not punished. K. Dolgov says that the persons involved in the warrant for Putin's arrest signed a death warrant for themselves. He also assures that Russia is saving children from neo-Nazism:

**K. Dolgov:**... *And what at this time? Our president was in Mariupol, he was in Sevastopol. He personally supervises the work on the restoration and, I emphasize, the development of social and economic infrastructure in the interests of the people, in the interests of those residents who have reunited with Russia, including children. We... He continues (our president), and we continue how Russia will save children from neo-Nazism. It is under the children's article the ICC is issuing this warrant.*

**O. Skabeeva:** *It is not clear to anyone who, whom and where stole.*

**K. Dolgov:** *Where stole? These children are saved! I saw these children in Luhansk, I saw their eyes, I saw their smiles, their laughter..."<sup>18</sup>.*

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<sup>18</sup>18 03/20/2023 at 11:30 a.m. "60 Minutes" program, "RTR Planeta" channel

K. Dolgov denies not only the guilt of the Russian Federation in the deportation of Ukrainian children, but also recognizes that Russia's war against Ukraine is completely justified, and generally expresses threats to the highest officials of the ICC for V. Putin's arrest warrant. Such statements reinforce the view that the entire civilized world is against Russia, and therefore Russia needs to mobilize even more efforts to fight against opponents who incite hatred against Ukraine and Western countries and promote war.

Justification of criminal deportation of Ukrainian children by Russia occurs due to the formation of the view that Russia actually has only good intentions and seeks to save Ukrainian children from the imaginary threat of Nazism and/or fascism. On June 04, 2023 at 05:08 AM, the storyline in "Vesti" program, channel "Rossiya 24", refers to the conference and other events organized by Russia regarding the so-called "evacuation of children from the combat zone." In addition, it is mentioned that Ukrainian children were taken away from their legal guardians in Europe. This is followed by V. Nebenzya, direct speech of the representative of the Russian Federation at the UN, who states that Russia "is evacuating children from the war zone provoked by the criminal Kyiv regime":

*"The truth is that the children were evacuated from the zone of hostilities provoked by the criminal Kyiv regime, that during all these 9 years of war in the Donbas, Kyiv was not interested in the fate of these children, systematically and deliberately endangered their lives, that there is no mass forced adoption, in that only orphans and children left without parental care from institutions located within the administrative borders of the DPR and LPR at the time of the recognition of their independence by the Russian Federation were transferred to temporary preliminary guardianship or temporary guardianship of Russian citizens. This institute is not an adoption."*

Taking into account the post of V. Nebenzya, as well as the fact that his expressed statement took place at the UN meeting, we can conclude that this is a purposeful position formulated and agreed with the Russian political leadership, which truly reflects the attitude of the leadership of the Russian Federation to the deportation of Ukrainian children. In fact, V. Nebenzya at the state level, as a person authorized to do so, claims that Ukraine is to blame for the fact that Russia started the war in Donbas, and Russia itself "saves" Ukrainian children by carrying out "non-violent evacuation".

On March 20, 2023, at 01:04 a.m., in the program "Voskresnyi vecher s Vladimirom Solovievym" ("Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyev") on "RTR Planeta" channel, Leonid Kalashnikov, who holds the position of chairman of State Duma of the Commonwealth of Independent States, said that he, together with H.

Zyuganov and Y. Kobzon, started the initiative "Children of Donbass", during which almost 16,000 children have been brought from Donbass to Russia since 2015 in rest house (Snegiri, Moscow Region) so that the children could, in his words, "take a break from shelling." According to L. Kalashnikov, sanctions were imposed on him and other initiators of the initiative for this. Next, L. Kalashnikov together with V. Solovyov claim that the leaders of Western countries, as well as judges of the International Criminal Court, act unfairly in relation to Russia and its leaders. They note that in history there were other cases of "selective" attitude of world-level courts towards certain politicians and other public figures. In this way, L. Kalashnikov is trying to create a certain idea of how he, together with other Russian political and public figures, took care of Ukrainian children and at the same time points out the hostile attitude of Ukraine and other countries to this, because they do not approve such initiatives. There are suggestions that this statement was made, among other things, in order to normalise and legitimise any actions that Russia takes against Ukrainian children despite international law.

At the same time, Iryna Klyuyeva, the "Child Rights Commissioner" in the annexed Autonomous Republic of Crimea, also spoke out with the aim of discrediting Ukraine and its partners. In the storyline on April 04, 2023 at 2:26 PM in "Vesti" program on "RTR Planeta" channel I. Klyueva claims that the return of the children to Ukraine was accompanied by the help of volunteer organizations, because the expenses for the trip to Ukraine are expensive. For this (according to I. Klyuyeva), volunteer organizations ask Ukrainian children to tell that the conditions of their stay in Russia were terrible. A voice-over, who narrates the storyline, accuses the Ukrainian authorities of blackmailing children who are in Russia. Such an expression discredits both Ukraine and its partners, who are portrayed as not interested in the legal mechanism for returning deported Ukrainian children home. In this storyline, the presenter talks about the fact that M. Lvova-Belova provided humanitarian aid in the territories occupied by Russia, and M. Lvova-Belova herself claims that children taken from the war zone can be handed over to relatives in Ukraine. The presenter assures that the Ukrainian authorities used the fact that the Russians transferred Ukrainian children to camps as a pretext for an informational attack on Russia. Despite discrediting, the storyline focuses on highlighting Russia's actions as helping Ukrainian children in every possible way, contrasting it with Ukraine and Western countries.

Another example of information that discredits Ukraine can be a fragment of recording on April 4, 2023 at 6:45 p.m. in "Vesti" program on "Rossiya 24" channel, in which the Ukrainian authorities are accused of using children "as a bargaining chip" to achieve their goals. The presenter in the news story claims that the Ukrainian authorities tried to intimidate the boy taken from Ukraine by Russia

by saying that his family would be threatened with death if he did not return to Ukraine and claim to be a victim of forced deportation. In the storyline, the direct speech of M. Lvova-Belova is provided and there were claims from her side that the attempt of the Ukrainian authorities to intimidate the boy is a deliberate and planned provocation with the participation of foreign special services. After that, a fragment of M. Zakharova's comment is shown:

"Now, any stories about our country will be invented, videos will be recorded, photos will be posted, the truth will be falsified, and the truth will be hybridly formed with lies, only in order to distract attention from the wild problems with children, which are located on the territory of countries, in particular, the European Union." Her comment was made as part of the official press conference of the Commissioner for Children's Rights M. Lvova-Belova at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

A review of these statements by Russian politicians and officials demonstrates that Russian politicians are spreading information that justifies the actions of the government of the Russian Federation and Russia's xenophobic policies. They try to slander Western countries (mainly European countries and the USA) in every possible way, so there are reasons to assert the coordinated work of Russian politicians, officials and the Russian media regarding the deportation of Ukrainian children. According to materials from the Yale School of Public Health, Russia has a coordinated network of federal, regional, and local officials directly involved in operational and political justification for the deportation of Ukrainian children. At least 12 of the individuals involved are not under US and/or international sanctions lists at the time of writing of this report<sup>19</sup>.

This confirms that the statements of Russian politicians regarding the deportation of Ukrainian children are systemic and interconnected. Moreover, the Russian media picks up such statements and claims of Russian officials and politicians and thus contributes to the formation of the idea of how Russia is supposedly engaged in the "rescue" of Ukrainian children, while Ukraine and Western countries prevent this in every way and generally pose a threat to Ukrainian children. This is how the Russian media forms the loyal attitude of the Russian people to the deportation of Ukrainian children and any actions of the Russian government in this regard. This contributes to the support of Russia's deportation policy not only within the borders of the Russian Federation itself, but also in those territories where the Russian media still work or

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<sup>19</sup> RUSSIA'S SYSTEMATIC PROGRAM FOR THE RE-EDUCATION & ADOPTION OF UKRAINE'S CHILDREN

to which they extend their activities with regard to russian media. Therefore, the russian media are complicit in the criminal activity of the russian federation in the context of the deportation of children, as they support and deepen the criminal deportation. Thanks to the sanctions packages of the European Union, it was possible to limit the broadcasting of russian TV channels and some other russian media<sup>20</sup>. Thus, at least "RTR Planeta", "Rossiya 24"/Russia 24 and "Mezhdunarodnyy Teletsentr"/TV Center International were included in the restrictions. In addition, the sanctions affected the National State Broadcasting Company of the Republic of Belarus "Belteleradiokompaniya" and the JSC "Voentelecom"<sup>21</sup>, leading operator of telecommunications services of the Ministry of Defense of the russian federation. Subsequently, the NTV-Mir channel was restricted, "Rossiya-1", "Ren-TV" and "Pervyi Kanal"<sup>22</sup>, however, russian propaganda media are constantly looking for loopholes to continue their propaganda, and therefore the issue of banning russian propaganda media cannot be finally resolved, at least not yet. For example, on the official website of VDTRK, TV channels such as Rossiya 24 and RTR Planeta are available for free online viewing<sup>23</sup>. This means that anyone, who wants and has access to the Internet, can watch these TV channels online.

Russian propaganda discredits Ukraine and its Western partners, as well as justifying russian war crimes and crimes against humanity, through the narratives and disinformation discussed below.

#### IV. NARRATIVES OF RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN BY RUSSIA

During the analysis, the most common disinformation theses and narratives used by the russian media during the selected period for monitoring and analysis were singled out. According to the EUvsDisinfo resource, at least 5 such theses and narratives can be identified in general:

##### *1. Abduction of Ukrainian children by russia is an absurd hoax<sup>24</sup>.*

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<sup>20</sup>[russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU adopts 9th package of economic and individual sanctions - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>21</sup>[Sanctions in detail - Olga Gerasimyuk explained what restrictions await russian TV channels in Europe -National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting \(nrada.gov.ua\)](#)

<sup>22</sup>[russian TV channels "NTV-Mir", "russia-1", "Ren-TV" and "Pervyi Kanal" - under the sanctions of the European Union - National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting \(nrada.gov.ua\)](#)

<sup>23</sup>[Evening with Vladimir Solovyov last episode сегодня смотреть \(smotrim.ru\)](#)

<sup>24</sup><https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/the-kidnapping-of-ukrainian-children-by-russia-is-an-absurd-hoax>

This thesis was voiced several times, in particular by officials of the Russian Federation, among whom were V. Nebenzya, M. Lvova-Belova, K. Dolgov and others. The narrative can also look like this: "Russia's abduction of Ukrainian children is not a war crime" or "Russia saved the children, not kidnapped them from Ukraine." Below are examples of statements.

**V. Nebenzya:** *"The truth is that the children were evacuated from the zone of hostilities provoked by the criminal Kyiv regime, that during all these 9 years of war in the Donbas, Kyiv was not interested in the fate of these children, systematically and deliberately endangered their lives, that no mass forced adoption exists..."*. V. Nebenzya denies the deportation of Ukrainian children by Russia, calling this process "evacuation". From here you can single out the narrative/thesis: "There is no such thing as deportation, Russia is carrying out an "evacuation".

**K. Dolgov:** *Where stole it? These children are saved! I saw these children in Luhansk, I saw their eyes, I saw their smiles, their laughter..."*. K. Dolgov does the same when he denies the deportation of Ukrainian children by Russia, but instead calls Russia's actions "rescue", referring contextually to the so-called "evacuation". By doing so, he is trying to substitute the concepts: "deportation" to "evacuation", because then the criminal actions of the Russian Federation become actually justified and good, and any obstacles to Russia on this path are incompatible with good intentions. From K. Dolgov's words, a narrative/thesis can be formulated: "Ukrainian children are not stolen to transfer to Russia, but rescued"

These two above narratives appear in different connotations in the Russian media, but they hardly differ in content, from which we can conclude that they are closely related in terms of meaning. Therefore, they fall under the rebuttal provided by the EUvsDisinfo resource. EUvsDisinfo's refutations are based on the conclusions of authoritative human rights and other specialized internationally recognized organizations, reports of European countries, which indicate that it is the Russian Federation that commits crimes against Ukrainian children. Among these organizations are the UN, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, which documented relevant violations from the Russian side<sup>25</sup>. The refutation of the statement of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, who stated, that "the granting of Russian citizenship to [Ukrainian children] or their adoption is contrary to the fundamental principles of child protection in situations of war... This is what is happening in Russia and should not happen..."<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>25</sup>[Disinfo: The kidnapping of Ukrainian children by Russia is an absurd hoax \(euvsdisinfo.eu\)](https://euvsdisinfo.eu/)

<sup>26</sup>[UN refugee chief: Russia violating principles of child protection in Ukraine | Reuters](#)



EUvsDisinfo also refers to the report by the Yale School of Public Health, which concluded that russia is deporting Ukrainian children and preventing their reunification with Ukrainian families<sup>27</sup>.

2. Arrest warrant issued by the ICC (International Criminal Court) against putin poses new challenges on the chances of peace.

The narrative is probably aimed at intimidating Western countries and international supranational bodies. This is due to the threat of criminal liability for the president of the russian federation v. putin and his associates. Western countries emphasize vladimir putin's personal responsibility for russia's aggressive war against Ukraine<sup>28</sup>. EUvsDisinfo's arguments against the russian narrative are as follows:

- Statements of authoritative international politicians (in this case, the statement of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy J. Borrell about v. putin's responsibility for russia's aggressive war against Ukraine)<sup>29</sup>.
- UN Human Rights Council's report stating that the russian federation carried out illegal deportations: "The Commission concluded that the russian authorities carried out illegal transfers and deportations of civilians and other persons under protection of Ukraine or to the russian federation, respectively. This is a war crime<sup>30</sup>".
- The position of the International Criminal Court, which stated that there are real grounds to consider v. putin and M. Lvova-Belova guilty of crimes committed<sup>31</sup>.

The EU Council's conclusion of February 9, 2023, states: "russia must immediately end this brutal war. The European Union will support Ukraine as much as it will be needed"<sup>32</sup>. At the same time, the West supports Ukraine with military and financial aid for effective self-defense of the country, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, to end russia's war of aggression against Ukraine<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> [data \(conflictobservatory.org\)](https://data.conflictobservatory.org/)

<sup>28</sup> [Disinfo: The arrest warrant issued by the ICC - International Criminal Court against putin poses new challenges to chances for peace \(euvsdisinfo.eu\)](https://euvsdisinfo.eu/)

<sup>29</sup> [russia's military aggression against Ukraine: EU imposes sanctions against President putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov and adopts wide ranging individual and economic sanctions - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/02/09/)

<sup>30</sup> [A/HRC/52/62 \(ohchr.org\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/docs/20230209A/HRC/52/62), p. 11

<sup>31</sup> [Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova | International Criminal Court \(icc-cpi.int\)](https://www.icc-cpi.int/en/press-releases/2023/02/09/)

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2023/02/09/>

3. *A secret society of pedophiles takes revenge on putin for the ICC warrant.*

The narrative refers to conspirological "callusion" theories<sup>34</sup>. There is a narrative similar in content: "Europe kidnaps Ukrainian children." Such a thesis was voiced repeatedly in the russian media:

- a. **TV channel "Planeta RTR":**M. Zakharova (Head of the Department of Information and Press of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the russian federation, official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the russian federation) claimed that the bodies and persons involved in the arrest warrants for v. putin and M. Lvova-Belova are involved, because there are certain interested groups of influential people in the West, who seek to import Ukrainian children for the needs of European pedophiles and as a resource for "black transplantology". On this TV channel, he narrated about the so-called "Pedophile lobby" is found several more times. In the program "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" from 01.05.2023 at 01:01 AM, it is said that the USA and other European countries engaged in the genocide of children, because they were involved in child trafficking, and russia saves Ukrainian children from the threat, although the countries of the world condemn such actions of russia. It is also mentioned that such activity was aimed at business benefit and was covered up by state authorities. P.Astakhov asserts that Americans took children out with the aim of involving them in prostitution, and then claims that the current investigation on the removal of Ukrainian children will also lead to nothing.

***Pavel Astakhov (former children's ombudsman of the russian federation):***"In 2008, Guatemala stopped American adoptions due to the fact that a network of brothels was deployed in the border areas of South America, close to Latin America, where Guatemalan girls, taken by the Americans for adoption, served clients. Do you hear anything about this? Have you seen the results of the investigation? Silence. It all closes at once. Topic: in 2012, Reuters journalists exposed the system of illegal adoption and sale of children. 35,000 children, including those who were given to pedophiles. Do you hear somewhere the results of the investigation of the American Themis? No, this investigation will also stall. It will also stall because they are all the same. For American politics of a foreign

<sup>33</sup>[Disinfo: The arrest warrant issued by the ICC - International Criminal Court against putin poses new challenges to chances for peace \(euvsdisinfo.eu\)](https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/secret-society-of-paedophiles-takes-revenge-on-putin-with-icc-warrant)

<sup>34</sup><https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/secret-society-of-paedophiles-takes-revenge-on-putin-with-icc-warrant>

*child... In general, for a representative of the Western political establishment, a foreign child is business and politics. That's it, nothing more."*

- b. **Internet resource "Obschestvenaya Sluzba Novostey":** In a conversation with a correspondent, Russian political scientist Serhey Markov said that it is not the Ukrainian government that deals with the sale of children, but individual corrupt officials. S. Markov: "It is possible to combat this horror and the suffering of children only with the help of a special military operation. Today, it is important to raise this topic in the mass media and talk about it more often. The West does not like when the topic of the pedophile lobby comes up. It is one of the main organizers of this war"<sup>35</sup>.
- c. **Internet resource "bloknot.ru»:** Shocking information was shared by US Army Colonel Douglas McGregor and Polish human rights activist Joanna Pakwycewicz. Former adviser to Donald Trump, US Army Colonel Douglas McGregor said that in Ukraine 50-60 thousand Ukrainian children "disappeared". Most of them became the prey of pedophiles in the USA and Europe. And human rights activist from Poland Joanna Pakhvytsevich revealed the mechanism of selling Ukrainian children to the West. Douglas McGregor said: "We know that 50,000-60,000 Ukrainian children are "missing" in Ukraine, who became prey for pedophiles in the USA and the West. We have open borders, millions of women and children from Ukraine move to the West, many become the object of attention of criminals and sexual offenders"<sup>36</sup>. All these narratives are similar in content.

According to the EUvsDisinfo rebuttal: as of March 21, 2023, 464 children were killed, 935 were injured, 389 were reported missing, 16,226 were deported, and 308 previously abducted children returned to Ukraine<sup>37</sup>. The narrative is aimed at discrediting the ICC, Western countries and Ukraine, because it is primarily meaningfully connected with the ICC arrest warrant. Russian propaganda tries to present the fact that the ICC issued an arrest warrant not as a consequence of the illegal actions of the Russian Federation and its leaders, but as an element of the conspiratorial policy of Western countries that are Russia's opponents. Russian disinformation media are trying to bring down the existing ICC institute

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<sup>35</sup><https://www.osnmedia.ru/obshchestvo/politolog-markov-rasskazal-kak-pedofilskoe-lobbi-zapada-razvyezalo-voynu-na-ukraine/>

<sup>36</sup><https://bloknot.ru/chp/desyatki-ty-syach-ukrainskih-detej-stali-doby-chej-evropejskih-i-amerikanskih-pedofilov-1102359.html>

<sup>37</sup><https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/secret-society-of-paedophiles-takes-revenge-on-putin-with-icc-warrant>

under the auspices of the UN in which 18 judges are involved, to individuals, not even to the judges or prosecutors themselves, but to a relative of the Prosecutor General<sup>38</sup>. This is how russian propaganda tries to undermine the authority of this institution. One of the first vivid references was M. Zakharova's comment in the "Evening with Vladimir Solovyov" broadcast on March 20, 2023, i.e. 3 days after the ICC issued the arrest warrant for v. putin and M. Lvova-Belova. The EUvsDisinfo materials state that the ICC issued arrest warrants for v. putin and M. Lvova-Belova in accordance with Article 8(2)(a)(vii) and 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute. The crimes were committed on the occupied Ukrainian territory at least since February 24, 2022. Maria Lvova-Belova, born on October 25, 1984 is responsible for the war crime of illegal deportation of the population (children) and illegal resettlement of the population (children) from the occupied territories of Ukraine to the russian federation (in accordance with Articles 8(2)(a)(vii) and 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute). The crimes were committed on the occupied Ukrainian territory at least since February 24, 2022. The warrant states that M. Lvova-Belova bears criminal responsibility for the deportation of Ukrainian children, being directly involved in this crime<sup>39</sup>. As proof of the crime committed, M. Lvova-Belova openly declares how she "successfully" carries out the deportation of Ukrainian children. In addition, there are confirmed cases of new documents being issued to Ukrainian children with falsified dates of birth.

#### 4. The ICC warrant for putin's arrest was issued because Western sanctions are ineffective

This narrative was voiced in "Vesti" program on "Rossiya 24" channel on March 17, 2023. During the broadcast of M. Lvova-Belova, the russian children's ombudsman said that Western countries resort to the decision of the International Criminal Court and other similar instruments, because they seek to intimidate russia. According to EUvsDisinfo: russia resorts to these narratives to avoid responsibility for its crimes. There are real studies and debates among Western experts and commentators on the effectiveness of sanctions. But contrary to what this disinformation story implies, the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for vladimir putin is not an escalation of Western pressure on russia in the face of the "foreseeable failure" of sanctions, but the result of putin's oversight of russia's documented practice of illegally deporting Ukrainian children. The European Union expressed support for the investigation of the prosecutor of the

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<sup>38</sup> <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/secret-society-of-paedophiles-takes-revenge-on-putin-with-icc-warrant>

<sup>39</sup> <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/secret-society-of-paedophiles-takes-revenge-on-putin-with-icc-warrant>

International Criminal Court<sup>40</sup>. The EU is the international entity that introduces sanctions packages against Russia, so the expression of its support is a confirmation that we can expect new sanctions against Russia and their improvement in the future. The Russian narrative about the ineffectiveness of sanctions is designed to downplay the consequences of sanctions on Russia and lower the authority of the International Criminal Court before the Russian audience.

5. Evacuation of children from Ukraine takes place in accordance with humanitarian law

This narrative appears in the Russian media in various interpretations: "Russia evacuates children"<sup>41</sup>, "Russia and its leaders promote the reunification of children with their families"<sup>42</sup>, "Russia promotes the adaptation of children to a peaceful life"<sup>43</sup> and others. In its refutation, EUvsDisinfo refers to the statement of the International Court of Justice about the arrest warrant for V. Putin and M. Lvova-Belova, as well as reports from internationally recognized authoritative human rights organizations such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. This is a recurring narrative that denies war crimes committed by the Russian Armed Forces and the Russian Federation in Ukraine. Investigations into Russia's crimes against Ukrainian people are still ongoing in Ukraine. Abducted children were mentioned in the statements of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, as well as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi<sup>44</sup>.

Mostly, these and other narratives are supplemented by disinformation that aims to discredit Ukraine and its political leadership in the context of child protection. The following is the most general narrative: Ukraine acts against the interests of Ukrainian children. This narrative was taken from the report of the children's ombudsman of the Russian Federation, M. Lvova-Belova, dated April 4, 2023<sup>45</sup>: "The work of the commissioner's body directly in the SVO zone, communication with children and their parents, and analysis of publications in the press demonstrate that Ukraine acts against the interests of children." This thesis was used in a publication posted on the official website of the children's ombudsman of the Russian Federation, a high-ranking official in Russia<sup>46</sup>. Therefore, this publication is publicly available and has an official status. This reflects the official position of the Children's Ombudsman on the criminal deportation of Ukrainian children, and also shows a clear sense

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<sup>40</sup><https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/icc-arrest-warrant-against-putin-was-issued-because-western-sanctions-dont-work>

<sup>41</sup><https://iz.ru/1416213/2022-10-26/pochti-350-sirot-iz-donbasa-ustroeny-v-priemnye-semi-rossii>

<sup>42</sup><https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2022/11/29/19150075.shtml>

<sup>43</sup><https://www.mk-donbass.ru/social/2022/07/19/podrostkam-iz-DPR-pomogut-adaptirovatsya-k-mirnoy-zhizni.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/evacuation-of-children-from-ukraine-is-in-compliance-with-humanitarian-law>

<sup>45</sup> Activities of the Russian Federation Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova to protect children during a special military operation

<sup>46</sup><http://deti.gov.ru/>

of organization, planning, coherence and systematic actions of the leadership of the Russian Federation in relation to Ukrainian children. In the report of M. Lvova-Belova there are other theses that are forms of a preliminary narrative about how Ukraine acts against the interests of children<sup>47</sup>:

- "Children become human shields for the Ukrainian military and neo-Nazi forces."
- "Ukraine persecutes Russian families and orphans of Donbas taken custody by these families, as well as Russian specialists who are involved in providing humanitarian aid to children and their families in new regions of Russia. They are threatened by phone and through social networks. Personal data of families and specialists are publicly available on the Internet."
- "Ukraine is putting pressure on parents whose children were sent to recreation camps and returned from recreation camps based on the territory of the Russian Federation".

Hereto it is worth adding a narrative about how Ukraine "kidnaps children" from families living on the front line<sup>48</sup> or how "Kyiv regime hunts children and forcibly takes them away from the frontline territories."<sup>49</sup> Data from the EUvsDisinfo resource indicate that Ukraine does not engage in child abduction, and similar Russian narratives are an attempt to shift responsibility for the crimes of the Russian Federation in Ukraine to the Ukrainian side<sup>50</sup>. The Ukrainian government supports, conducts<sup>51</sup> and finances<sup>52</sup> the evacuation<sup>53</sup> and accommodation of Ukrainian citizens, including children from particularly dangerous areas and territories of hostilities. On April 4, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine supported the initiative of the Donetsk regional military administration regarding the mandatory evacuation of 126 children from 21 settlements in the region. It is emphasized that "abduction of children from families" is out of the question. Children accompanied by parents or guardians are transported in armored vehicles, evacuated families are provided with free housing in safer Ukrainian regions, as well as social guarantees, humanitarian aid and psychological support<sup>54</sup>.

The narrative of Russian propaganda about "abduction of children by Ukraine" was uttered by V. Nebenzya on April 5 during the so-called meeting under "formula Arria" at the UN. Russia, intending through the UN to

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<sup>47</sup> Activities of the Russian Federation Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova to protect children during a special military operation, p. 10

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.stopfake.org/uk/strong-fejk-ukrayina-vikradaye-ditej-iz-simej-yaki-zhivut-na-liniyi-frontu-strong/>

<sup>49</sup> [https://aif.ru/politics/world/angelskaya\\_ohota\\_na\\_detey\\_kuda\\_kiev\\_siloy\\_vyvozit\\_malyshey\\_iz\\_donbassa](https://aif.ru/politics/world/angelskaya_ohota_na_detey_kuda_kiev_siloy_vyvozit_malyshey_iz_donbassa)

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.stopfake.org/uk/strong-fejk-ukrayina-vikradaye-ditej-iz-simej-yaki-zhivut-na-liniyi-frontu-strong/>

<sup>51</sup> [Evacuation from dangerous territories of Ukraine continues Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine \(kmu.gov.ua\)](https://kmu.gov.ua/en/evacuation-from-dangerous-territories-of-ukraine-continues)

<sup>52</sup> [About the allocation of funds from the reserve... | dated 03.06.2022 No. 446-r \(rada.gov.ua\)](https://rada.gov.ua/en/about-the-allocation-of-funds-from-the-reserve...)

<sup>53</sup> [About holding a mandatory ev... | dated 02.08.2022 No. 679-r \(rada.gov.ua\)](https://rada.gov.ua/en/about-holding-a-mandatory-ev...)

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.stopfake.org/uk/strong-fejk-ukrayina-vikradaye-ditej-iz-simej-yaki-zhivut-na-liniyi-frontu-strong/>

legalize aggression against the Ukrainian people, as well as to position itself as a "peacemaker". In response, 49 UN member states adopted a joint statement accusing Russia of "spreading disinformation about mass abductions and illegal forcible deportation of thousands of Ukrainian children." This confirms that Russia is resorting to systematic manipulation and disinformation to justify its criminal actions.

Russian propaganda also often uses the topic of adoption of Ukrainian children in order to demonstrate the Russian Federation's "concern" for safety of children from the occupied territories of Ukraine. So, an example can be a storyline of 16.02.2023 at 07:08 PM in "Vesti" program on "RTR Planeta" channel. The storyline tells about the meeting of V. Putin with M. Lvova-Belova regarding the program of adoption of Ukrainian children by citizens of the Russian Federation. A voice-over sounds the information that, thanks to Russian applications for adoption of children from Donbas, many orphans were placed in Russian families. The storyline states that governors also promoted the orphan adoption program. Then information appeared that Russia managed to take even more children out of the war zone. In the storyline, V. Putin claims that the hostilities in Donbas for 8 years, "unfortunately, affected small citizens of Russia." At the end, it is said that for teenagers from the territory of Donbas, the Commissioner's Institute is preparing integration changes together with "Sirius" center, which are described as "career guidance and moral support to help children adapt to life in a new country." After that, a voice-over tells about how the military-patriotic upbringing of "difficult teenagers" was carried out in the Chechen Republic.

*Voiceover: Last year, Chechnya accepted a military-patriotic shift. Mentors for the so-called "difficult teenagers" from all over Russia became veterans of the SVO.*

*M. Lvova-Belova: We would like to continue this for 1000 teenagers. Now I will spend a cycle of shifts in the Caucasus in different regions, and I wanted to ask for a little money for this.*

There were such messages in the online media, in particular<sup>55</sup>. This fragment indicates, firstly, the intentions of the Russian leadership in the future to carry out measures for adoption of Ukrainian children by Russian families, and, secondly, the intentions to implement and expand the so-called measures of "military-patriotic education for children". These two aspects will be considered separately in the next 2 subsections.

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2023/02/16/detskiy-ombudsmen-lvovabelova-rasskazala-putinu-kak-usynovila-rebenka-iz-mariupolya.html>



## **Adoption of Ukrainian children by russian families in russian propaganda**

The very term “adoption” in relation to Ukrainian children in the russian media is found mainly in the reports of russian journalists. Russian officials hardly use this term, or at least replace it with "form of custody", "form of guardianship", "temporary guardianship" or similar:

*A) V. Nebenzya: "Currently, only orphans and children left without parental care from institutions located in the administrative borders of the DPR and NPR at the time of recognition of their independence by the russian federation were transferred to temporary preliminary guardianship or temporary custody of russian citizens."*

*B) K. Mishonova: Until now, we have not had an agreement between the russian federation and, accordingly, the DPR and the LPR. And for us it is understandable to take children from another state, and for them, in turn, to give children to another state... Well, it was legally impossible. It was illegal. That's when all the interested departments rallied to make this possible, concluded additional agreements, put all the documents in order. Now this is temporary custody. Of course, we will watch how events will develop, and then it may be permanent guardianship.*

*C) M. Lvova-Belova: But I want to emphasize that the children came under temporary custody, temporary foster families, because initially you said about adoption - this is, well, a slightly different form of arrangement. Then there will be a foster family. We are working on it now. On Tuesday, there will already be a meeting of the first headquarters, which should regulate the legislation of the russian federation and the L/DPR so that families can already calmly engage in raising their children. Well, plus, we have other children, whom I hope we will be able to place in our russian families.*

In addition, russian propaganda emphasizes that such guardianship is established exclusively for orphans, although certain legislative changes in the russian federation are necessary for this. This was also stated by M. Lvova-Belova at a meeting with the President of the russian federation v. putin (fragment from March 9, 2022 at 7:17 p.m. in "Vesti" program on "RTR Planeta" channel). In this video, the presenter talks about the meeting between the president of russia v. putin and the Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova, during which bureaucratic obstacles to the registration of children taken out of Ukraine into russian families were discussed. One of these obstacles was called the lack of russian citizenship for many children. V. putin offers M. Lvova-Belova to submit her proposals to the parliament in order to speed up the procedure for registration of children.



In fact, v. putin confirms that Ukrainian children need to change their civil status in order to acquire guardianship, which is prohibited by international law. Obviously, in order to avoid additional responsibility for the criminal deportation of Ukrainian children, v. putin, as well as the involved russian officials, together with the russian media, use the term "form of guardianship" or "temporary guardianship" and not "adoption", which would be contrary to the norms of russian legislation. At the same time, in some storylines in the russian media, it is mentioned that Ukrainian children are granted russian citizenship despite already having Ukrainian citizenship. Thus, the storyline claims the alleged dual citizenship of Ukrainian children (for example, fragment from 04.04.2023 at 6:14 PM in "Vesti" program on "Rossiya 24" channel):

***Voiceover:** Maria Lvova-Belova reported on the return of 16 Ukrainian children to their families. Earlier, they were evacuated to russia from the SVO zone. Their lives and health were in danger. And now they have reunited with their relatives living in Ukraine and other countries. 22 small orphans from Mariupol, as well as 380 orphaned children from the DPR and LPR were placed in foster families in russia. All children received russian citizenship, while retaining their previous citizenship. But there are no such plans that they will necessarily remain in the russian federation.*

In one of his statements, P. Astakhov (former children's ombudsman of the russian federation ) claimed that during the so-called "evacuation" the children were not asked what their citizenship was, but were simply "taken away, rescued"<sup>56</sup>. By this, P. Astakhov asserts the indiscriminate nature of the deportation of Ukrainian children.

There are significant differences between status and rights granted by adoption or guardianship in the russian federation. Adoption, according to the OSCE report, makes it possible to make fundamental changes in relation to adopted of the child, including changing the name, date and place of birth and even reissuing the birth certificate in line with these changes. In addition, adoption can be established only in court, and the principle of secrecy of adoption applies in the russian federation.

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<sup>56</sup><https://rutube.ru/video/15a34a536f4a7c1111558bb93b463a9b/>

Therefore, de facto - the report notes - it becomes impossible to establish the true identity of adopted children. That is, there is a real threat that Ukrainian children adopted by russian families will become even more difficult to find and return to Ukraine, because real information about children from Ukraine can be hidden or distorted<sup>57</sup>. The report of the OSCE Mission states that such adoption is a violation of Article 21 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>58</sup>. Accordingly, any assistance in the adoption of Ukrainian children by russian families, in particular, in the form of the so-called "amendments to simplify the granting of russian citizenship" is the same violation of this article. If norms are adopted in the russian legislation that differ in their legal content from adoption and guardianship, but will contain their elements, then Ukrainian children, in case of adoption of such changes, risk becoming hostages of the legal uncertainty of their status in the russian federation, and, as a result, victims of marginalization in russian society.

**Therefore, statements of high-ranking russian officials about the need for such amendments, as well as the work on them, testify about the organized criminal activity at the state level to deport Ukrainian children with signs of genocide.**

The OSCE mission noted numerous legislative and executive acts adopted in the russian federation at both the federal and regional levels, which relate to the simplification of obtaining russian citizenship by some categories of Ukrainian children<sup>59</sup>. Moreover, the mission was informed about numerous cases of adoption of Ukrainian children, which were carried out in violation of Article 21 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>60</sup>. That is, despite the statement in the russian media that Ukrainian children are not adopted, but only placed under "temporary guardianship", cases of real adoption took place. Thus, the russian media hid the facts of the illegal adoption of Ukrainian children and thereby created conditions that would facilitate the further commission of crimes.

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<sup>57</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, with. 62

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, with. 63

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, with. 62

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, with. 63

Despite the fact that the russian media spread information about the so-called "voluntary evacuation", the real facts documented by the OSCE mission indicate that there were facts of forced deportation or "evacuation" without voluntary consent. Although international law indicates that the parties should prevent victims among the civilian population and therefore the evacuation of children to russia could have a humanitarian nature, but in reality the so-called "humanitarian evacuation" took place with gross violations. It mostly refers to cases when an unauthorized person gave his consent to "evacuation" of children, as well as direct disregard of the consent of authorized persons to evacuate children. The mission is also aware of situations where the russian authorities persuaded, manipulated the hopeless economic situation of families and even resorted to threats in order to induce parents to consent to the removal of their children to the territory of russia.

On the other hand, the russian propaganda media deny this information or do not mention it at all, because "children were evacuated only with the voluntary consent of their parents"<sup>61</sup>. In other cases, such as the separation of children from their parents during filtering, it is quite clear that it was violent<sup>62</sup>. The mission recorded cases when Ukrainian children stayed in russia much longer than it could be promised by the russian side, and the procedure for returning children turned out to be much more complicated. For example, there were cases of demanding by russian side additional supporting documents from Ukrainian families, as well as known cases of frequent relocation of Ukrainian children, which generally indicates a lack of desire on the part of the russian side to repatriate Ukrainian children as soon as possible, which is a very gross violation of international law<sup>63</sup>. In addition to this, some russian officials directly claim that they are preparing a legal framework so that in the future it will be possible to provide permanent guardianship to Ukrainian children. A vivid example of this is the statement of K. Mishonova:

*"Until now, we have not had an agreement between the russian federation and, accordingly, the DPR and the LPR. And for us it is understandable to take children from another state, and to them, in turn, to give children to another state... Well, it was legally impossible. It was illegal. That's when all the interested departments rallied to make this possible, concluded additional agreements, put all the documents in order. Now this is temporary custody. Of course, we will watch*

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<sup>61</sup> <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5826392?query=дети%20украины>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, p. 67

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, p. 45

*as events will develop, and then it can be permanent guardianship."*

*"... All interested departments rallied to make this possible, concluded additional agreements, put all the documents in order, and there is a legal, in general, already valid history, according to which children are coming to us to Moscow region on perfectly legal grounds."*

Although it was stated in some russian media that Ukrainian children will not lose their Ukrainian citizenship, in reality, in the russian federation, at the legislative level, the procedure for withdrawing Ukrainian citizenship from children under the age of 14, including children who do not have legal guardians, children-orphan who are in children's institutions, with the simultaneous acquisition of russian citizenship<sup>64</sup>. Some laws of the russian federation, which relate to the procedure for acquiring russian citizenship by citizens of Ukraine, contradict the principle of the child's participation in making a decision about him or the child's right to be heard, because they do not provide that a child under the age of 14 will be asked whether he wants to acquire russian citizenship<sup>65</sup>. Therefore, despite an illusory propaganda picture of how the russian federation grants Ukrainian children additional russian citizenship, Russian media and officials conceal numerous violations of international humanitarian law, distort the facts of crimes committed and shift the responsibility for them to Ukraine and its Western partners.

### **Erasure of the national identity of Ukrainian children**

Children are one of the most vulnerable categories of population, and, therefore, a key task of the state in the conditions of war is to prevent their militarization. Therefore, during the monitoring, attention was drawn to one of the stories on russian television. This is a russian report from February 16, 2023 at 7:08 p.m. in news program "Vesti" on "Planeta RTR" TV channel, where it was mentioned about military and patriotic education in Chechnya, organized for "difficult teenagers". Literally the direct speech of the voice-over:

*"Last year, Chechnya accepted a military-patriotic shift. Mentors for the so-called "difficult teenagers" from all over russia became veterans of the SVO.*

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<sup>64</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, p. 56

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, p. 57

After that, M. Lvova-Belova is depicted asking v. putin to allocate funds for such measures indicating the intentions of the russian children's ombudsman in the future to support and promote such "education" that is actually re-education. From the direct speech, it may not be immediately clear that Ukrainian deported children were involved in such activities, but OSCE mission report is as a good reason to state otherwise. The report states that the mission is aware of credible reports of so-called "patriotic education", which includes requirements to sing the russian national anthem, as a rule, every day, as well as to participate in various lessons aimed at changing Ukrainian children's understanding of history and geography, the political context of Ukraine and russia. Thus, for example, Ukrainian children should participate in history lessons with various historical facts in a favorable light for the russian federation. It is important that the basis for such lessons is the idea that Ukraine has always been part of russia and its rightful place is to be part of the russian federation<sup>66</sup>. The mission was not able to establish a single case when even an element of Ukrainian culture was allowed by the russian authorities<sup>67</sup>. Instead, Ukrainian children who were deported to the territory of russia are integrated into the russian educational system according to russian educational standards.

According to the information presented in the report of the OSCE mission, it can be concluded that the government of the russian federation directs its efforts to the political socialization of Ukrainian children in russian society. This can be evidenced by situations recorded by OSCE mission, when Ukrainian children underwent military education, which includes their free time as part of general education and/or extracurricular activities. According to the report, such training has signs of "compulsory or forced games". Children are also required to join youth organizations, such as military-patriotic clubs of various cities and the so-called "Cossack Cadet Corps". The report provides for an example when Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Tatarstan Leyla Fazlyeyeva noted in August 2022 that "all camps... are aimed at patriotic education of youth, development of communication skills, preservation of the [russian] language, cultural heritage."<sup>68</sup> The so-called "military-patriotic" training included military training, as well as lessons about military activists of the russian federation and even weapons assembly training, as reported in the OSCE report<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>66</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, p. 55

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, p. 64

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, p. 64

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>, p. 56

In the conditions of war, re-education of Ukrainian children is not only a serious crime against international law, but also an instrument of the policy of the aggressor state against Ukrainian people and their statehood. Taking into account the fact that deportation of Ukrainian children to the territory of russia is taking place with numerous gross violations of international law, namely: lack of consent of the legal guardians of the children or their parents to take the child to the territory of russia, russian government's assistance in the acquisition of russian citizenship by Ukrainian children, disregarding interests of the child regarding making any decisions regarding his/her, actual adoption or provision of various forms of guardianship that lead to prolonging the stay of Ukrainian children on the territory of russia, bureaucratic obstacles to Ukrainian parents reuniting with their children, manipulation and threats aimed at inducing Ukrainian parents to hand their children over to russia, as well as re-educating Ukrainian children while ignoring their cultural and national needs and identity, one can conclude that there are clear and factually confirmed signs of deportation and erasure of the national identity of Ukrainian children. That is why the term "forced deportation" should be used to refer to russia's actions in the context of the removal of Ukrainian children.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of monitoring russian media and analyzing their messages and stories, several conclusions can be drawn:

- 1) russian officials and high-ranking officials are often sources of narratives and disinformation regarding real circumstances of the illegal criminal removal of Ukrainian children to the territory of the russian federation. They state about it openly, publicly and at the official level both in the russian federation and at the international level within the framework of international organizations and the activities of these organizations. This may point to the organized and coordinated campaign at the highest state level to deport Ukrainian children and promote such deportation, in which the russian state and non-state media selected for analysis participate. In turn, this indicates the purposeful long-term and systematic nature of such propaganda influence, which serves criminal policy of the russian federation to deport Ukrainian children.
- 2) The information disseminated by russian officials and the media is mostly disinformation, which in all cases either discredits Ukraine and its allies, or justifies russia's actions in the context of the deportation of children, or resorts to these two methods at the same time. This may indicate the presence in the russian information environment on the topic of Ukrainian children of an "us-them" dichotomy, where "we (i.e. russia) act justifiably

and do good, and "they" (i.e. Ukraine and the countries of the West) do evil and are adversaries." This technique is typical for inciting enmity and propaganda for war.

- 3) Thus, russian media, spreading statements of russian officials and politicians regarding Ukrainian children, as well as spreading their own disinformation on this matter, create an information environment isolated from objective reality, in which russia plays a role of a state that "saves" and does good, and Ukraine and the Western countries that oppose russia are evil. This prevents the access of russian citizens to reliable information about the fact that russia is actually committing crimes, encourages civilian population and russian army to commit even more brutal crimes against Ukrainians, misleading other consumers of russian media on territories abroad that are covered by a satellite signal or where russian online media can operate without restrictions and creates a situation where these illegal crimes are justified and tolerated, and therefore do not deserve attention in the world. All this is accompanied by a systematic and gross violation of international humanitarian, russian and Ukrainian law.
- 4) Deportation of the Ukrainian population is one of the signs of the genocide of the Ukrainian people, and it had numerous factual confirmations in the reports of international human rights and supranational organizations. The deportation of Ukrainian children is a component of the deportation of the Ukrainian population and was carried out in order to erase the national identity of Ukrainian young generations. The russian media's justification of deportation and discrediting of Ukraine and Western countries is an attempt by the russian federation to avoid responsibility for the crimes committed and to gain greater support for the criminal policy of the russian political leadership among the population and at the level of the international community. Therefore, justification of the deportation of Ukrainian children by the russian media is further encouragement of genocide of the Ukrainian people that indicates the involvement of legal (media) and physical media persons in crimes committed by the aggressor state, in particular, in genocide. That is why the russian federation, in the person of its political leaders and high-ranking officials, as well as direct perpetrators of criminal acts and their accomplices incorporating russian media, commit crimes for which international criminal liability shall be borne.